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LEXINGTON MOTOR (LATER ABURN AUTOMOBILE) COMPANY
Connersville
Fayette County
Indiana

Photographs and
Written and Historic data
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Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Lexington Motor (Later Auburn Automobile Company)

HAER IN-11

Location:	North side of 18th Street, opposite Columbia Ave. UTM: 16.659280.4390910 Quad: Connersville, Indiana
Date of Construction:	1910
Present Owner:	H.H. Robertson
Significance:	The Lexington Motor (later the Auburn Automobile) Company was one of the major auto- mobile production plants in Connersville.
Historians:	Robert Rosenberg Donald Sackheim

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The Lexington Motor Company, first housed in a barn in Lexington, Kentucky, was established in 1909 by Kinsey Stone, a local promoter and horse racer. In 1910, following a discussion with a group of Connersville businessmen, he moved his company to more suitable quarters at 18th and Columbia Streets in the Connersville Industrial Park (see HAER IN-7). With the help of his chief engineer, John C. Moore, Stone developed the Lexington automobile.

The company was plagued by financial problems and in 1913, E.W. Ansted acquired the Lexington Motor Company. The Lexington auto formed the backbone of Ansted's automobile empire. The car went through several model changes between 1910 and 1927, and many of its major components--frame, top woodwork, body and engine--were manufactured in Ansted-owned subsidiary plants.

In 1914, the name of the firm was changed to the Lexington-Howard Company. The Howard Distributing Company contracted for a large six-cylinder touring car, the Howard. When the Howard auto was discontinued in production after eight months, the name of the firm was changed back to the Lexington Automobile Company.

The U.S. Automobile Corporation, formed during the fall of 1919 as a \$10 million preferred stock corporation, was a holding company for various Ansted-owned enterprises: the Ansted Engine Company, the Connersville Foundry Corporation, and the Lexington Automobile Corporation.

The property of the Lexington Automobile Company, along with the Ansted Engineering Company, went into receivership in April 1923. The receivers were unable to show profits, and the factory was sold to Bigger and Better Connersville, a civic group, in November 1926. After a series of legal entanglements were resolved, the plant was sold to the Auburn Automobile Company in 1927, the same year that Auburn bought the Ansted Engine Company.¹

The Eckhart Carriage Company, established in Auburn, Indiana in 1874, changed its name to the Auburn Automobile Company in 1900, apparently to reflect a shift in its product line. In June 1919 the Eckhart family sold the Auburn Automobile Company to a group of Chicago bankers. The Chicago bankers operated the firm with limited success until they approached Errett Lobban Cord to take over its management in August 1924. Cord, who had managed a successful auto agency in Chicago, reportedly refused a \$36,000 a year contract and asked instead for twenty percent of the profits--if any could be shown--and an option to buy all of the common stock. Cord proved so successful that within five years the bankers were bought out and Cord controlled the Auburn Automobile Company, with several of Auburn's major suppliers. On 14 June 1929 Cord formed a holding company, Cord Corporation, to consolidate his holdings.

Errett Lobban Cord was born on 20 July 1894 on a farm in Warrensburg, Missouri and later moved to Los Angeles with his parents. Cord made a fortune rebuilding old cars and invested it in a chain of garages. He lost the garage business after attempting to run a trucking firm in Death Valley, and when he left California for Chicago he was virtually penniless. In Chicago he found a job selling automobiles at the Moon auto agency and within a year became sales manager.

Cord operated the Auburn Automobile Company in Auburn before relocating the major portion of the operation in Connersville. Apparently the Eckhart Carriage Works was too small and its multi-storied arrangement was ill-suited to assembly-line production.

In 1926 Cord took the first step in acquiring control of several of Auburn company's major suppliers when he traded Auburn Auto stock for a controlling interest in Dusenbergl. The following year, 1927, he gained control of the Lycoming Engine Company of Pennsylvania and bought two of Connersville's major auto plants--the Lexington Automobile Company and the Ansted Engine Works. Along with two other Connersville firms--the Central Manufacturing Company, acquired in 1928, and the McFarland Auto Company, acquired in 1929--Cord controlled most of Connersville's automobile production. By 1 January 1929 the Auburn Automobile Company owned nearly 82 acres in Connersville and had approximately 631,299 square feet of it developed as manufacturing space. Cord spent an estimated \$2 million rennovating the plant and built several additions in order to facilitate the flow of goods through the factory. On 14 June 1929 E.L. Cord directed the reorganization of several companies under his control, and as a result the Auburn Automobile Company became a subsidiary of the Cord Corporation.

In 1929 Cord also bought a sizable block of the Aviation Corporation (AVCO), a holding company which controlled several small aviation firms. Cord was elected to the Board of Directors. In 1932 he initiated a proxy fight and eventually gained control of AVCO.

The AVCO Corporation won control of the Connersville plants following Cord's resignation and the sale of his stock on 6 August 1936. 2 The first week in January 1938 a reorganization took place under Section 77B of the Federal Bankruptcy Act. After a series of legal maneuvers the Auburn Automobile Company and the Central Manufacturing Company were reorganized as the Auburn-Central Company on 14 May 1940, and in March 1942 the name was changed to the American Central Company.

The American Central Company sold the Connersville plant to Design Manufacturing Company in 1958.

Lexington Motor (Later Auburn Automobile) Company: The Building

The factory changed substantially during its use as an automobile assembly plant. The Lexington Automobile company built the original brick and frame two-story structure in 1910 on the northeast corner of Columbia and 18th Streets. The following year, a small 40' x 32' addition was joined to the north end of the structure and in 1911 a 21' x 125' wood-framed addition to the northwest of the original plant was constructed.

Following Auburn Motors' acquisition of the factory in 1927, a major renovation occurred. Approximately \$2 million was spent by Auburn construction on additions and remodeling.

Lexington Motor (Later Auburn Automobile) Company: The Building

Notes

- 1 According to Blommel, the selling price of the Ansted Engine company was \$40,000.
- 2 There are conflicting reports about Cord's sale of the Auburn Automobile Company. The Indianapolis Star of 22 June 1970 reported a selling price of \$6 million, while the N.Y. Times reported \$2.5 million. Shortly after the sale of the company, it was reported that Cord was enjoined by a Federal Judge from manipulating Auburn Stock. See the Indianapolis Star, 8 August 1937.

Lexington Motor Company

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